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INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC FEMINISM

PART III - HERMENEUTICS
OF ISLAMIC FEMINISM

WOMEN IN ISLAM SERIES



MUSLIMS FOR
PROGRESSIVE VALUES

FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

A theory and system of interpreting texts, specifically religious and sacred texts, that centers the interests and rights of women as primary in its understanding of the content.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

In modern times, women are excluded from the ulema, the interpreters of Islam's religious texts, contrary to the early days of Islam, when women, like the wives of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), were responsible for transmitting the Qur'an and the Hadith.

Rather than benefit women, this exclusion has only served to harm Muslim women, who are unable to cultivate their *ilm* (knowledge) as commanded in the Holy Qur'an. Moreover, refusing a woman's authority over religious texts is a direct contradiction to the egalitarian lessons of the Qur'an and the cultural patriarchal practices that prevent women from exercising this authority are inherently unIslamic practices.



WHAT ARE THE ASPECTS OF FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

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Based on the perspective of women

2

Framed through feminist theory

3

Uses historical context

4

Applies the intratextuality method

5

Prioritizes the monotheistic framework



Based on the perspective of women

EMPHASIZES

the
importance
of the
experiences of
women as
they interpret
the Qur'an.

REJECTS

the perceptions
men have
about women
that influence
how they
interpret the
Qur'an.

CONSIDERS

the role and
status of
Muslim women
in the religion
to produce
gender-just
interpretations.



Framed Through Feminist Theory

CENTERS

on a
framework
of gender
equality and
gender
justice.

EXPOSES

the patriarchal
interpretations
that
perpetuate
inequality and
injustices.

DEPARTS

from any
gender bias
present in the
classical
interpretations
of the Qur'an.



Uses Historical Context

FOCUSES

on the context of time and background of the verse and its revelation.

DEFINES

verses that identify the situation and condition of 7th Century Arabian society and universal verses.

IDENTIFIES

the importance of reading a text according to current historical and societal norms



Applies the Intratextuality Method

READS

each verse according to the themes of the entire text rather than in isolation.

COMPARES

verses of the Qur'an to one another to identify how the Qur'an advocates for justice

RECOGNIZES

that no interpretation of a verse can contradict the Quranic principle of gender equality.



Prioritizes the Monotheistic Framework

RECOGNIZES

the unity of
God and the
uniqueness
and
indivisibility
of God.

IDENTIFIES

sexism as
idolatrous
because it
deems women,
creations of
God, to be
imperfect.

HIGHLIGHTS

the
importance of
tauhid
because no
human can
be compared
to God.



A Feminist Reading of Verse 4:34

As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct (nushūz), admonish them (first, (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat (ḍaraba) them (iḍribū) (lightly). (Surah al-Nisa 4:34)

TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

- *Nushūz* is interpreted as wife's disobedience, disloyalty or rebellious attitude towards her husband.
- *Daraba* has been interpreted in a number of different ways including: strike, scourge, beat, and discipline.

FEMINIST INTERPRETATION

- *Nushūz* is interpreted as a disruption of marital harmony as it is used in Surah al-Nisa 4:128 to refer to men.
- Recognizes that a literal meaning cannot be applied to *daraba* because
 - Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was never violent towards his wives.
 - There are multiple meanings of the word *daraba*, including "to separate".
 - Other verses in the Qur'an (4:19) prohibit violence and harm in a relationship.
 - To condone domestic violence would violate the basic themes of the Qur'an including compassion, justice and human dignity.



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